



# Back a Ways with Gertie

By SEWELL FORD

**J**UST for the week-end, then," urges Pinckney. "Do come and see my ten-acre front lawn with a dozen peacocks strutting over it. Most absurd sight in the whole State of Connecticut—really!"

"Peacocks!" says I. "Raisin' tail feathers for the market, are you? Or are they just pets?"

"Peacocks amuse me," says Pinckney. "They're feathered satires, Nature's comic relief to the tragedy of the poultry yard. Peacock Lodge, I call my place, you know. And you simply must see the shack I've put up there!"

"I'd love to," says Sadie; "but there's baby sister."

"Pooh!" says Pinckney. "As though Mother Whaley wasn't in full charge of her! Come, only three days. We'll motor up, all four of us."

"Which four?" says I. "I thought that—"

"Yes, Geraldine is up there now," says Pinckney. "The fourth will be Mrs. Duntley-Kipp."

"Wha-a-at!" says I, staring. "The Busy Bride?"

As for Sadie, she just lifts her eyebrows. "Some more of Geraldine's welfare work," says Pinckney. "She has undertaken to champion Mrs. Duntley-Kipp against a cold and cruel world."

"That's some contract," says I.

"Isn't it?" agrees Pinckney.

**N**OT that his set is gettin' finicky about unburied pasts, or is drawin' the line at statutory decrees; but when it comes to practisin' matrimony as free and casual as she had—three divorcees in half a dozen years, and one of the trials includin' such entertainin' episodes as that about the bunch of orchids—well, that's almost stretchin' the limit.

Pinckney proceeds, though, to state the case for the defense. Maybe Mrs. Duntley-Kipp had been a bit frolicsome in her early twenties. But as for old Duntley, it had served him right. Didn't he as much as buy her outright from young Shipley, who'd married her at nineteen? And wasn't Reggie Kipp a

bounder himself? Besides, for the last few years she'd been living quietly abroad, and would have stayed there very likely if she hadn't been routed out.

But when one's villa is made a field headquarters by one of the Kaiser's division commanders, and one's vineyards and rose gardens are cluttered up with Taubes and masked batteries, what is one to do? Mrs. Duntley-Kipp had skittered back to New York with seven trunks, two maids, and her pet Pomeranian. She wasn't trying to break in again, not formally. But one does want a rubber of bridge now and then, and a cup of tea with old friends.

**S**HE was lonesome, that's all. And the poor soul didn't have the plague, or anything like that, you know. Besides, she was clever, deucedly clever, and, with her prematurely gray hair, perfectly stunning. If it hadn't been for that stupid tale about the orchids, which a female lady journalist had invented—absolutely!—she might have slipped back in without attracting any attention. But that Orchid Bride tag wouldn't wear off, and folks who'd had affairs of their own were repeating the story gleeful and givin' her the cold shoulder.

"So Geraldine's taken her up," concludes Pinckney.

"I'm glad she has," says Sadie. "And we'll go."

That's Sadie, all right. Show her where it's a case of the under dog, and she's with you every time.

"Are you includin' me too?" says I. "Say, you ain't goin' to expose anybody as susceptible as me to—"

"I shall be there to keep an eye on you," laughs Sadie.

"Huh!" says I. "You're takin' a chance, that's all!"

It's an old joke between us; so we know it's a good one. Even Pinckney is trained so he works up a smile when it's trotted out.

"I'll chaperon you, Shorty," says he. "And suppose we start about ten Satur-

day morning? I'll send the car in for Mrs. Duntley-Kipp, and we'll pick you up as we come through."

**W**ELL, that's how it was. And, say, maybe you remember the pictures printed of her at the time. Some star, eh? And believe me she ain't gone to seed any. I've seen flossy grass widows, but none that had anything on her. When she trips out of the limousine here the other morning and insists on seein' little Sully and the baby before we leaves, I just stands one side and gawks. Why, she's even kept her dimples and pink and white complexion, and with her veils down she'd easy pass for a chicken!

One of the slim, graceful, willow-wand kind, you know. A sparklin' converser too. Say, to hear her and Pinckney pass it back and forth was as good as listenin' to one of these drawin'-room Granville Barker comedies. Sadie falls for her at once. The lady even has me swappin' a line of polite josh with her before we'd been ridin' half an hour together. Yes, I got to admit that Mrs. Duntley-Kipp is some charmer.

I was able to keep from gettin' dizzy in the head at that, though. Some of this froth was natural, I expect, and then some of it might have just been thrown in because she was grateful. Anyway, we was 'way up above Bridgeport almost before we knew it. Then we branched off to the north on a new pike, and went boom-in' through a lot of cute pie-belt scen'ry. Finally, at a crossroads, Mrs. Duntley-Kipp gets her eyes on a sign.

"Seavers Falls, two miles," she reads. "Oh, Seavers Falls—I do wish we were going through there!"

"Why not?" says Pinckney, pushin' the buzzer.

The chauffeur slows up.

"I say, Emil," he goes on, "can't you take us through this Falls place and get back to the main road somehow?"

Emil shrugs his shoulders and touches his cap. "I know not, sir," says he. "I will discover."

"Oh, thank you," says the lady. "You see, once I spent a summer at the Falls,—oh, when I was quite a girl,—a delightfully silly summer, and—and I've never been there since."

"Ho, then, for Seavers Falls and a silly summer once-upon-a-time!" says Pinckney. "You shall show us the very spot. Did he have roguish blue hair and curly eyes?"

Mrs. Duntley-Kipp runs her tongue out at him. "Brown eyes," says she, "big and serious,—oh, very serious,—and dark, wavy hair, rather long."

"I see," says Pinckney. "You sat together in a twine hammock and read Browning."

"Nothing of the sort," says she. "We fished for bullheads below the Falls, and picked blueberries on Cleft Mountain, and paddled up the river in a leaky old punt, all through two wonderful summer months. Ah, that August moon! There's never been one like it since."

"And about Labor Day, I suppose," adds Pinckney, "you both went back to town—and forgot?"

"He lived here," says she. "I believe he said he was going to work in his father's shingle mill. Fancy! I wonder if he's still making shingles?"

"Perhaps," says Pinckney. "When one gets the shingle-making habit—"

"Oh, there it is!" breaks in Mrs. Duntley-Kipp. "Cleft Mountain! Why, it isn't nearly so high as it used to be. See the bare brown spot near the top? Sweet-fern! You roll it in thin birch bark and smoke it. He showed me. It makes your eyes smart; but it's great fun. I burned a big hole in my pink challis. We patched it with court plaster so it didn't show. Around the next turn now should be the old blacksmith shop, with a tall elm on each side. Yes, yes! See?"

"The sign says 'Gasolene, 19 cents,'" says I.

"That is what happens to all the dear old blacksmith shops," says she, "pretending they're garages. Now we're getting into town. There's the feed store! And Masonic Hall! What! A moving picture show in Masonic Hall? How horrid! We went to a church social there